

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today urged Congress and the international community to take additional action to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. A May 23 report by the International Atomic Energy Agency found that "Iran has sharply upgraded its capacity to enrich uranium in recent months while the outside world's access to and grasp of Tehran's nuclear program 'has deteriorated.'" [Source: Los Angeles Times, May 23, 2007]

A senior U.N. official said that Iran may have the "minimum capacity necessary to start producing enriched fuel for nuclear reactors or nuclear weapons in about a year." The IAEA also "warned that it could not 'provide assurances about ... the exclusively peaceful nature' of Tehran's expanding nuclear effort." [Source: Los Angeles Times, May 23, 2007]

"Iran's defiant pursuit of nuclear weapons grows more serious by the month, and is a threat to the peace and stability of the entire world," said Mitchell. "As I have said before, it must be a national priority to prevent the Iranian regime from acquiring a nuclear weapon. The United States has a responsibility to work closely with the United Nations and our allies to utilize every tool at our disposal to peacefully end Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons."

Mitchell called on Congress to pass H.R. 1400, the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act, of which Mitchell is a co-sponsor. The Iran Counter-Proliferation Act seeks to peacefully prevent Iran from securing nuclear arms and the means to produce them. The measure calls for enhanced U.N. Security Council efforts in response to Iran's continued defiance of the international community and expands bilateral sanctions against Iran by severely limited the export of U.S. items to Iran.

According to the Los Angeles Times,

"Iran has started low-level operation of 1,312 centrifuges, which are used to enrich uranium, and has begun testing or is constructing 820 additional centrifuges, in a vast underground chamber at the country's main nuclear facility at Natanz, the report by the Vienna-based IAEA said. The total is more than three times as many centrifuges as Iran had at the facility three months ago."

"At the current installation rate, a senior U.N. official said, Iran will install 3,000 centrifuges by the end of June. If those machines can spin at supersonic speeds for an extended period, they will give Tehran the minimum capacity necessary to start producing enriched fuel for nuclear reactors or nuclear weapons in about a year." [Source: Los Angeles Times, May 23, 2007]